

The Decision Not to Emigrate

Land Prospecting in Eastern Kansas and Nebraska in 1886

by Dennis E. Suttles

September 6th 1886

Ills. Greene Co.

I, J.W. Reynolds with my Brother. joined by another friend prepared a covered wagon with provisions & cooking and Camping Utensils have the day mentioned started on a prospecting tour for Missouri Kansas and Nebraska with good health clear wether and every thing Bright before us.¹

Thus began a journal that John Wilson Reynolds Jr. wrote as he, his brother Richie Campbell Reynolds, and a distant cousin, Ulysses Samuel Pinkerton, traveled through Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska on a land prospecting tour. They left the small town of Berdan, Illinois, some sixty miles north of St. Louis, Missouri, on the morning of September 6, 1886. For the next thirty-four days they traveled by covered wagon over county and state roads recording their observations in a small notebook they carried with them on the trip.

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1. John Wilson Reynolds, "Journal," September 6–October 10, 1886, private collection of Betty and Harlan Van Gerpen, Cedar Falls, Iowa. The journal passed from Richie Reynolds to his son Cleatus, who passed it to his daughter Betty Reynolds Van Gerpen. It is written in pencil in a very clear hand. The covers are missing but the pages are fastened securely together with string at the top of the notebook. John Reynolds entered his journal comments in short, incomplete sentences. He accurately notes the date, weather, and location of each stop along the trail. While the information Reynolds gleaned from area farmers and his own observations may differ from that offered by contemporary government reports, his journal records the estimates and reflections of farmers at a particular time and place along his itinerary. Unless specifically cited, all information in the text of this article is taken from Reynolds's journal. The Reynolds and Pinkerton family photographs are from the private collection of Carla and Elmer Suttles, Winchester, Illinois.

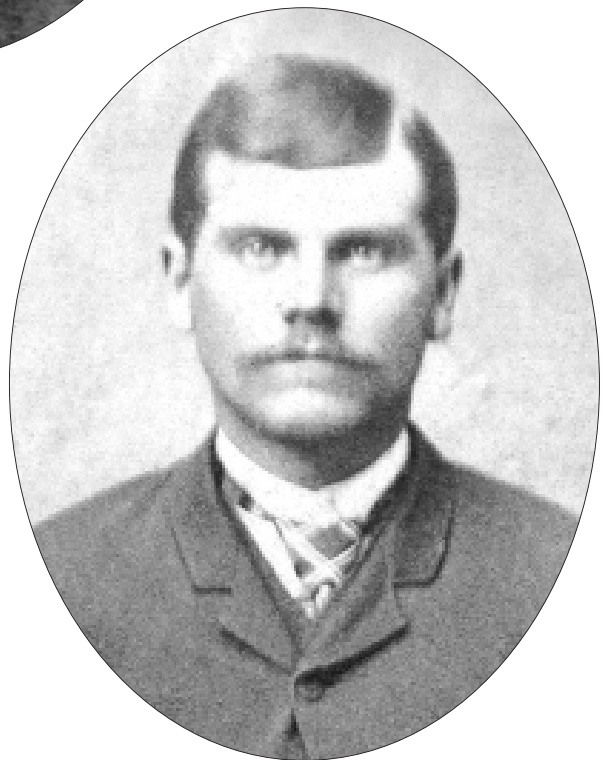
Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 26 (Summer 2003): 92–107.



John Wilson Reynolds Jr.



Ulysses Samuel Pinkerton



Richie Campbell Reynolds



Land promoters issued thousands of materials extolling Kansas as a land full of promise, influencing many individuals to make a personal examination of the area, and many more to emigrate west.

Reynolds, age thirty-one, and his companions (Richie Reynolds, twenty-three, and Pinkerton, twenty-two) planned their trip in advance and collected information a farmer would need to evaluate the prospects for settlement. John Reynolds meticulously recorded data regarding land prices, markets, crops, livestock, fencing, geography, weather, transportation, settlement, and cultural institutions. Once back in Illinois, the three men would be able to reflect accurately on what they had seen.

Although favorably impressed with parts of the diverse country through which they traveled, they ultimately chose to remain in Illinois. Reynolds returned to a young wife in Monmouth, Illinois, and his brother would marry Pinkerton's sister within two months of their return to Illinois. Although Reynolds and his companions did not provide any specific reasons for their decision, strong family ties to each other and to their family farms seemed to exert a great influence. Reynolds's journal provides a glimpse into how enterprising farmers east of the Mississippi River prospected for land in Kansas and Nebraska and challenges the perspective of the American West as an unfailing land of opportunity.

Although Reynolds and his companions remained in Illinois, the lure of the trans-Missouri region enticed many farmers to leave their established farms east of the Mississippi River for Kansas and Nebraska. In 1884 the Kansas legislature directed the State Board of Agriculture to distribute sixty-five thousand promotional tracts throughout Europe and the United States to encourage immigration to Kansas. Western land agents and railroad promoters presented exaggerated claims of a land full of promise to hard-working men and women. These attractions, coupled with glowing letters from recently emigrated family and friends, influenced many young men and women to make a personal examination of the land.²

The Reynolds brothers and Pinkerton planned their trip in advance by writing letters to people in Kansas and Nebraska to learn about the region. John Reynolds entered brief notes in his journal stating that he corresponded with two people a year before the trip. He wrote to "V. C." of "N. L. I." between May 15 and June 1886, and also corresponded with "E. F. B." beginning on September 12, 1885, until October 1886. Reynolds's use of initials to identify his correspondents makes it difficult to identify the individuals and to determine the connection they had with the three young men.

The travel journal suggests that Reynolds and his brother knew several Illinois families who had emigrated to Nebraska and Kansas after 1870.³ Correspondence with

2. Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fifth Biennial Report, 1885-1886* (Topeka: State Printer, 1887), 47.

3. Between 1870 and 1880 almost all states east of the Mississippi River, except a few along the Atlantic Coast, suffered a net loss of 1.3 million in population to western migration. Illinois was the biggest loser with 320,000 of its citizens migrating west to such states as Kansas, which became the largest winner with 347,000 new migrants settling within its borders. During the next decade Illinois again was the largest contributor of people to the western states. However, many of these emigrants bypassed Kansas for Nebraska and states farther north. See Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897, The Economic History of the United States*, vol. 5 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 39.



Portrait of the Reynolds family, Monmouth, Illinois. Richie Reynolds stands at back row, center, with John Jr. to his left. Patriarch John Reynolds Sr. is seated in front of Richie, with his wife, Jane Campbell Reynolds, seated to his left.

the Wallace brothers of Pawnee City, Nebraska, and John Smiley, William Brown, Thomas Brown, and Andrew D. Hutchinson of Marshall County, Kansas, may have encouraged them specifically to consider Pawnee County, Nebraska, and Marshall County, Kansas, for possible settlement. These families were at one time neighbors of the Reynolds family in Warren County, Illinois. The three men also kept in contact with Pinkerton's uncle, George King of Ottawa, Kansas, through correspondence with the Pinkertons in Greene County, Illinois. These community and family connections were important introductions to the trans-Missouri region that may have compelled these young men to make the journey to see the land for themselves.

In the fall of 1884 the Chicago *Inter-Ocean* reported that a large number of people from Illinois and other midwestern states were leaving to start anew in Kansas. The droughts of 1881, 1882, and 1883 gave way to a period of adequate rainfall and better crops in Kansas and Nebraska dispelling the pessimism of past crop failures and reviving a sense of optimism about Central Plains agriculture. Between 1884 and 1887 a large number of emigrants left their homes in Illinois, the greater Midwest, and the East to establish homesteads in Kansas and Nebraska. This new swell in emigration crested in Nebraska in 1885 and in Kansas in 1886. By the spring of 1885 the settlement of the

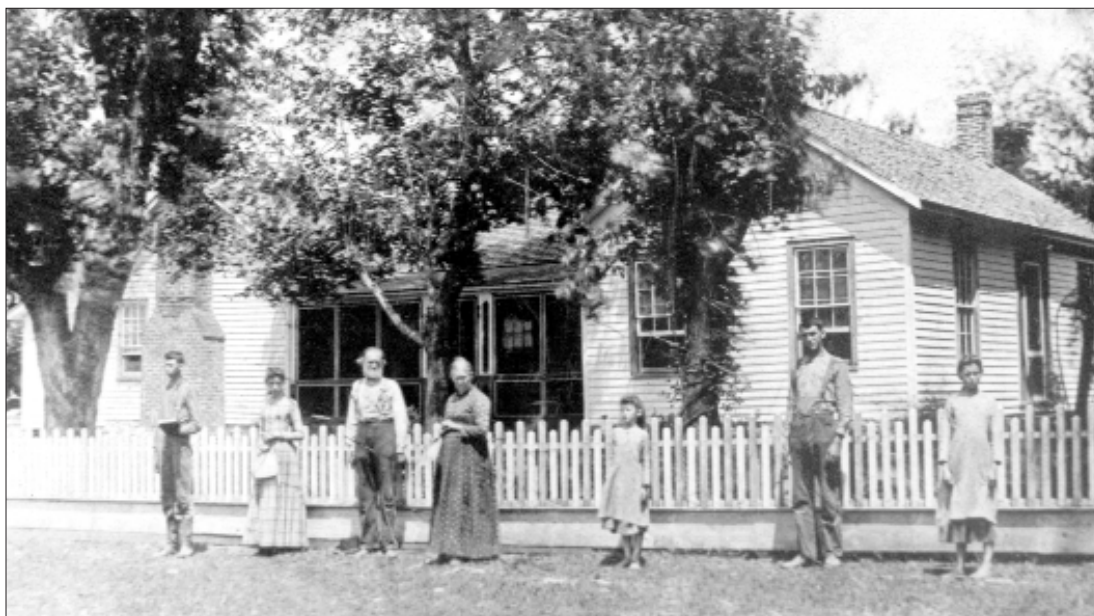
last of the Nebraska and Kansas frontiers in the western parts of each state were near completion.⁴

While glowing newspaper reports extolling the promise of Kansas and Nebraska agriculture and the presence of family and

former neighbors in specific Kansas and Nebraska counties suggests that the process of chain migration lured these Illinois farmers west, it does not explain how they examined the land in eastern Kansas and Nebraska. How did they approach an evaluation of the area they explored? What did they find? What decision did they reach as a result of their land prospecting tour?

Although the journal covers just over one month of travel, it tells us much about how some emigrant farmers from western Illinois in the 1880s evaluated land in Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska for possible settlement. John Reynolds and his companions compared the farms and communities they visited during their trip against those with which they were familiar in Illinois. In fact, they employed a set of criteria that helped them evaluate the agriculture of the three-state region through which they traveled. These criteria included: the physical characteristics of the land important to a farmer, crop production, land prices, and fencing. To a lesser extent, Reynolds took account of the social, cultural, and business climates of the

4. Gilbert C. Fite, *The Farmers' Frontier, 1865–1900*, *Histories of the American Frontier Series* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 116–17.



The Pinkerton homestead, Berdan, Illinois. Ulysses Pinkerton stands at the far left, with his parents, Willis Randall Pinkerton and Mary King Pinkerton, standing third and fourth from the left, respectively.

communities they visited. The background of these three Illinois farmers explains in part the importance of these criteria.

John Jr. and Richie Reynolds were born in 1855 and 1863, respectively, on a farm in section 10 of Hale Township northwest of Monmouth, Warren County, Illinois, a community thirty miles northeast of Burlington, Iowa. Their father, John Wilson Reynolds Sr., moved to the area from North Carolina, where strong disagreement over slavery had caused a rift in the Scotch-Irish Reynolds clan. In 1846 he married Jane Campbell and the family grew and prospered. Politically John Reynolds Sr. and his sons were Republicans. The Reynolds patriarch also served as school director in Hale Township for many years. John and Jane Reynolds were active members of the Sugar Tree Grove United Presbyterian Church, which met in a building across the pasture from the Reynolds farmhouse. From their parents, John Jr. and Richie Reynolds developed a closeness to the land and a deep religious faith that was evident throughout their travel journal.⁵

5. *Portrait and Biographical Album of Warren County, Illinois* (Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1886), 276. John Sr., who was born near Statesville, North Carolina, on August 14, 1818, married Jane Campbell, an Ohio native, on September 1, 1846. The couple had ten children, eight of whom reached adulthood.

The Reynolds farm in Hale Township was situated in the heart of Warren County in the western prairie region of the state between the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers. The rich deep loess soil once supported a tallgrass prairie separated by islands of oak and hickory forests. Prairie lands gave way to highly productive corn fields and pasture land for cattle. In 1872 the average annual rainfall for the county was estimated at forty-two inches and the average temperature for the year was fifty-two degrees Fahrenheit.⁶

Prior to 1850 the area between the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers ranked above the state average in the production of corn, wheat, cattle, hogs, sheep, and milk cattle, a bit below for hay and oats. The area was more diversified than most in Illinois due to its access to markets via the river systems. By 1870 the growth of Illinois railroads and the meat-packing industry of Chicago, coupled with the introduction of the refrigerated railroad car, increased the market for fattened cattle and hogs in northern and western Illinois. By 1886 the growth of corn and livestock production and the destructive chinch bug practically ended wheat production in western Illinois. Most Warren County farmers were growing corn and hay to supplement the fattening of cattle and hogs for market in Illinois.⁷

6. *Atlas of Warren Co. and the State of Illinois* (Chicago: Warner, Higgins and Beers, 1872), 9.

7. Peter Nelson, "A History of Agriculture in Illinois with Special Reference to Types of Farming" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1931), 7–14.

During the 1880s the Reynoldses periodically traveled 110 miles south to Greene County, Illinois, where they visited their cousin Robert B. Pinkerton. As a young man, Robert grew up with the Reynolds children in Warren County, but later his family moved to Greene County to live near their Pinkerton relatives. These visits brought them in contact with a distant cousin, Ulysses Samuel Pinkerton, who lived on a farm near the outskirts of Berdan, a community sixty miles north of St. Louis, Missouri.

Ulysses Pinkerton was born on April 25, 1864, on the 160-acre farm that was a part of three hundred acres his grandparents, David and Celia Pinkerton of Virginia and North Carolina, settled in 1823. The son of Mary and Willis Pinkerton, Ulysses grew up on the family grain and livestock farm along with his six brothers and sisters. Although his mother belonged to the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in nearby New Providence, Illinois, the remainder of the family were members of the United Baptist Church at Hickory Grove.⁸ At the time of his trip to Kansas and Nebraska, Ulysses remained unmarried and worked with his father on their Greene County farm.⁹

Greene County lies in the southern part of the Illinois River valley. The Pinkerton farm was located near Apple Creek which flows into the Illinois River twelve miles west of Berdan. The limestone bluffs along the Illinois River were abundant with natural springs that provided fresh water from shallow wells. The broken lands near the bluffs were gently rolling and covered with timber. When cleared of trees, the soil was almost as rich as the deep, black loam of the small prairies that were scattered east of the Illinois River bluffs.¹⁰

Prior to 1850 general crop and livestock farming characterized agriculture in Greene County. Between 1850 and 1870 census records show an even distribution of corn, wheat, oats, hay, and livestock in this area. Farming was more diversified here than in other parts of the state due to

the county's access to markets via the Illinois River and via railroads after 1850. By 1870 corn became the chief crop of this region, hay and oats diminished in importance, and wheat almost completely disappeared from farms due to the destructive infestation of chinch bugs. Dairying increased in importance in those counties near St. Louis. By 1886 corn, cattle, and dairy products became the focus of the Pinkerton farm.¹¹

From a well-watered land abundant with timber, corn, cattle, hogs, poultry, orchards, and arbors, the three young men set out on their journey by covered wagon to explore prospects for settlement in Kansas and Nebraska. The Reynolds brothers and Pinkerton left the latter's farm at ten in the morning of September 6, 1886, making the banks of the Illinois River by that evening. The next morning they crossed the river at Bedford landing in Pike County and traversed the Illinois River bluffs to Detroit where they camped by the side of the state road. On the following day they traveled through Pittsfield, New Salem, and Barry, reaching the Mississippi River at one in the afternoon of September 9.

Upon crossing the Mississippi River at four o'clock that afternoon, the Illinois emigrants passed through Hannibal, Missouri. They camped one mile west of town on the state road where John Reynolds described the land as hilly and divided by picket fences encircling fields of "poor crops of all kinds." Between September 9 and 23 the three men traveled the state road through Missouri from Hannibal to St. Joseph taking note of the geography, crops, livestock, fencing, transportation, towns, cultural improvements, and the price of commodities and land. For the most part they were favorably impressed with the land but noted how the drought of the past two years had taken its toll on crops and livestock.

As Reynolds and his companions neared the end of their sojourn through Missouri on Thursday, September 23, they passed through Stewartsville over hilly land broken by ravines. They soon came upon the wide Missouri River bottoms where they saw large herds of cattle. Passing through Claire Station, the three caught their first sight of St. Joseph, Missouri. Reynolds was impressed with the large city of thirty thousand people. The city's impressive buildings, especially the Missouri Insane Asylum situated on a hill two miles east of town, attracted his attention. The

8. New Providence was also known as Belltown. See James N. Adams, comp., *Illinois Place Names* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society, 1989), 291.

9. Ulysses's father, Willis Randall Pinkerton, was born on the same farm on March 31, 1827, and grew up to farm the land with his father. In 1858 Willis Pinkerton married Mary Elizabeth King in Berdan. Celia Freer Reynolds, "Pinkerton Family History," private collection of Betty and Harlan Van Gerpen, Cedar Falls, Iowa. Celia was the wife of Richie Reynolds's son Cleatus. *History of Greene County, Illinois* (Chicago: Donnelley, Gassette and Loyd, 1879), 649; *History of Greene and Jersey Counties, Illinois* (Springfield, Ill.: Continental Historical Co., 1885), 1017-18; *White Hall (Ill.) Register*, April 28, 1905.

10. *History of Greene and Jersey Counties, Illinois*, 221-23.

11. Nelson, *A History of Agriculture in Illinois*, 7-14.

men spent an hour in town, then made their way to the Missouri River bridge. Reynolds wrote that “the Cars and Wagons travels on the same track and sidewalks at Either side Length 300 r[o]ds. Tole 40 c[en]ts for horses and Wagon. River very low.” They crossed the river, passed through Elwood, Kansas, and camped four miles west of town.

From their camp they could see Wathena, Kansas, in the distance. On Friday they passed through the town and traveled west to the county seat of Troy, where they camped that evening. Part of Doniphan County encompassed the Missouri River bottoms where they found fields of corn fenced with wire. The river bluffs near Wathena gradually gave way to rolling land broken by ravines. Reynolds found water scarce. Wells measuring from twenty to sixty feet deep provided poor quality water. Wathena boasted of a garment factory that employed thirty-two women who sewed men’s and boy’s overalls. The town also served as a shipping point for the orchards in the area. Reynolds and his companions saw trees breaking down under the weight of good quality fruit. The bluffs were so rocky that they only produced grass and clover for pasture. However, the bottom lands with their rich soil produced excellent fields of corn, taller than corn at home in Illinois.¹²

On September 25 the three men traveled from Troy in central Doniphan County to Severance and Highland on the western side of the county. The land between Troy and Severance resembled that of the river bluffs but the crops were exceptionally good. According to Reynolds, local corn yields reached fifty to eighty bushels per acre while oats and wheat produced thirty bushels per acre. Farmers in the region put much of their corn in cribs indicating to Reynolds that the 1885 crops were very good. On their way to Highland that day, Reynolds and his companions were impressed with the excellent quality of corn and wheat in this rolling land bordered by the Missouri River bluffs on the east. The beautiful groves of trees, wonderful orchards,

12. Doniphan County was organized in 1855. It covers 379 square miles of northeastern Kansas. In 1886 it had a population of 13,105 and thus a population density of 34.57 people per square mile. The steep bluffs of the Missouri River overlook a rich flood plain averaging one mile in width and comprising 25 percent of the county. The rolling prairie west of the bluffs is laced with belts of timber that follow meandering streams. In 1886 Wathena was home to 626 people and a steam-powered overalls factory producing twenty thousand dollars in annual product value. Of the 151,000 fruit-bearing trees in Doniphan County, 87 percent were apple trees. See Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fifth Biennial Report*, 184–89; Reynolds, “Journal.”

and rich, black soil were very productive. They found the water good, but scarce. Wells were shallow due to the layer of rock that lay just beneath the earth’s surface. They camped near the border of Doniphan and Brown Counties where they remained for the Sabbath. The three men religiously observed Sunday as a day of rest throughout their trip by refraining from unnecessary work or travel.¹³

On Monday, September 27, the men traversed central Brown County.¹⁴ Reynolds glowingly reported in his journal:

Our travels of today are through central and Western Brown Co. where lays the most Lovely Country, the Sun Ever shown upon. Good land, Good water, Orchards, plumbs, Grapes, fine Groves. Country Building Excelled by none for beauty and site. the long sloping hills are waving with Golden corn as far as the Eye can see, and every thing alive and Lovely

The next day, they entered Nemaha County where they found the land rocky and full of gravel, good only for pasture. Residents raised large numbers of cattle and hogs successfully in this region.¹⁵ After reaching Sabetha in eastern Nemaha County, the men turned north toward Ne-

13. Perhaps due to the drought, acres planted in corn decreased by 12,234 from 1885 to 1886; winter wheat was down 13,351 acres; acres in spring wheat down 2,387; and oats decreased by 1,879 acres. Corn yields decreased an average of twelve bushels per acre while oats increased by five bushels per acre, winter wheat by nine bushels per acre, and spring wheat by one bushel per acre. See Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fifth Biennial Report*, 187.

14. Brown County was organized in 1855. It covers 576 square miles of the glaciated region of northeastern Kansas. In 1886 the county’s population density was 27.60 people per square mile. The county primarily is rolling upland prairie interrupted by forests along the banks of creeks that drain the prairie. In 1886 corn production in Brown County more than tripled that of oats and wheat. See *ibid.*, 94–97; George E. Ham and Robin Higham, ed., *The Rise of the Wheat State: A History of Kansas Agriculture, 1861–1968* (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower University Press, 1987), 5, 17.

15. Nemaha County was organized in 1855. It covers 720 square miles of the glaciated region of northeastern Kansas. In 1886 the county had a population density of 25.29 people per square mile. The land is very similar to that of Brown County on its eastern border but with more outcropping of magnesian limestone, or dolomite, in the broken and hilly regions. Although unprofitable to mine, thin veins of coal are found in the northeastern corner of Nemaha County near Sabetha. The numbers of hogs and cattle raised in the county surpassed that of horses, milk cows, mules, and sheep in 1885. Farmers raised more than twice as many hogs as cattle in 1886; however, due to a hog cholera epidemic in eastern and central Kansas, farmers lost eight times as many hogs as cattle in 1885. Losses in twenty-five hog-producing counties amounted to \$1,138,500. At six dollars per head, this represented 189,750 hogs. See Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fifth Biennial Report*, 391–92, 395; *ibid.*, *Quarterly Report, December 31, 1885* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1886), 148–49.



In the northeastern corner of Kansas, particularly in Doniphan County, Reynolds and his companions were impressed with the wonderful orchards and good quality fruit. The abundance of apples is evident in this photo of an orchard near Troy, Doniphan County.

braska. Upon reaching Nebraska, the rolling land became more hilly and rocky. Great ravines cut into the hills creating valleys and rocky points that appeared to be good only for pasture. Since the hills could not be cultivated, cattle grazed upon them. Where the Nebraska counties of Richardson and Pawnee met Nemaha County, Kansas, the land was extremely rugged—so rough that the tops of the hills could not be mowed.

Reynolds and his companions considered land in southern Richardson and northeastern Nemaha Counties. In his journal Reynolds described several tracts of land and the prices farmers sought for them:

In Southern Richardson there is nice Prairie land 1000 Acres have just been fenced this summer so no more land is lying out in Neb[raska in] Rich[ard]son Co[unty]. across the line in Ka[nsa]s in North Eastern nemaha Co[unty], there is 320 Acres of raw land not fenced. 100 a[cres] fine farming land, the rest broken. Price \$6,000. farms west 1 mile, fair land of 80 a[cres] with improvements valued at \$1000. dollars. price \$2,500.¹⁶

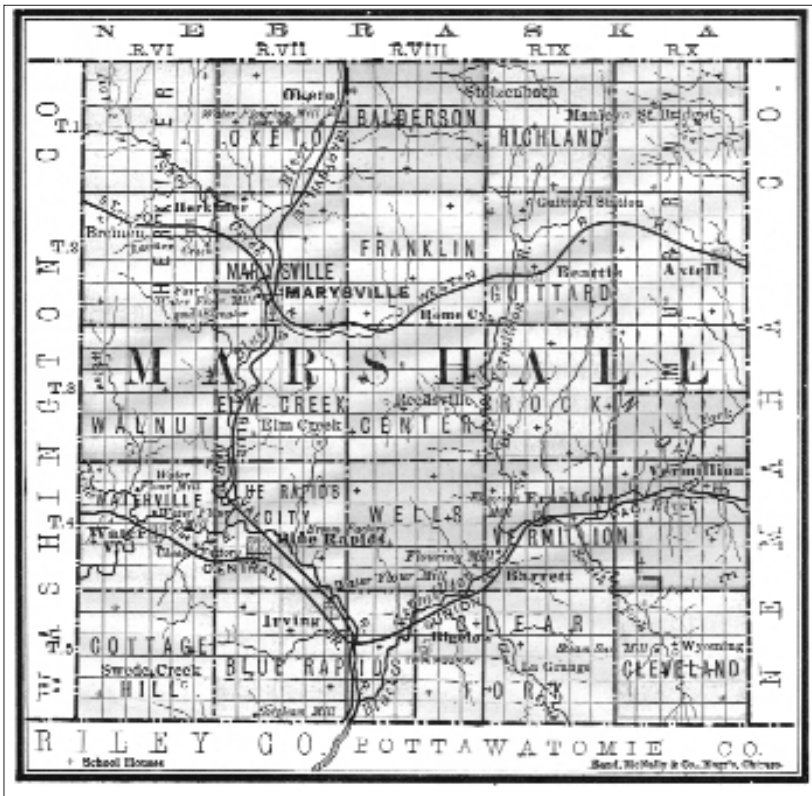
Despite the ruggedness of the terrain, Reynolds wrote favorably about what he saw. On the average, he estimated that land in the three-county area was worth between twenty and fifty dollars per acre depending upon the land and its improvements.

16. The term “raw” land refers to unimproved land.

The Reynolds brothers and Pinkerton crossed into Pawnee County, Nebraska, on Wednesday, September 29. They passed beyond Du Bois and traversed hilly pastures of wild prairie grass to Pawnee City. Their excursion into Nebraska appeared to be driven by their desire to reach the county seat of Pawnee County. The Reynoldses may have known G. G. Wallace and his brother R. B. Wallace, natives of Warren County, Illinois, and publishers of the Pawnee City *Republican* and the prohibition newspaper, the *Enterprise*. G. G. Wallace moved to Pawnee City in the spring of 1878 and published the first issue of the *Enterprise* on May 15, 1878. Both of the Wallace brothers graduated from Monmouth College, G. G. in 1877 and R. B. in 1881. When Judge W. F. Wright, the original owner of the *Enterprise*, retired in 1879, G. G. Wallace purchased the newspaper and continued as its sole owner until his brother joined him in 1881. The Wallace brothers and the Reynolds brothers were all United Presbyterians and members of the Republican Party. While John did not mention the Wallaces in his journal, there was ample opportunity for them to meet and discuss the prospects for settlement in the Kansas–Nebraska area.¹⁷

Reynolds and his companions continued on their journey several miles southwest of Pawnee City to the Bur-

17. *History of the State of Nebraska* (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1882); *The Past and Present of Warren County, Illinois* (Chicago: E. F. Kett and Co., 1877), 224, 262.



From Nebraska, the three travelers crossed into Marshall County, Kansas, where they visited several farms owned by former residents of Illinois. From the county's northern corner, the men traveled south to Beattie and Vermillion, and on into Pottawatomie County. The map (left) appeared in the Kansas State Board of Agriculture Biennial Report for 1885–1886.

recorded in his journal that unimproved land went for fifteen dollars per acre and improved land sold for thirty dollars. Southern Gage County contained fields of corn and pastures for grazing cattle. Richie and Ulysses camped for the night in Burchard Prairie near the Kansas border, while John spent the night with the Nashes.

At 9:30 on the morning of September 30, Reynolds left William Nash's farm and joined his comrades at the Mission Creek post office. After

chard Prairie where fourteen thousand acres of raw land were available for settlement. The nineteen-square-mile area was rough in places and could be purchased for fifteen dollars per acre. Area farmers used the surrounding land for raising corn and grazing cattle.

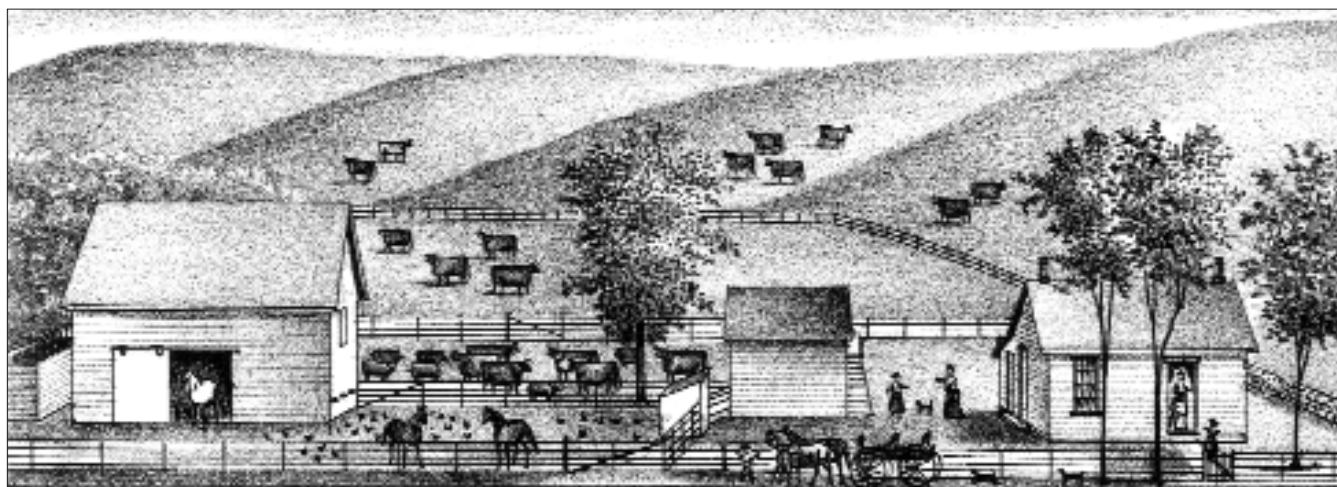
They traveled farther west to the town of Liberty in Gage County where they turned south to Mission Creek, just north of the Kansas border. Reynolds noted the presence of the 135-member United Presbyterian Church of Mission Creek and its nearby parsonage. One mile southwest of the church and the Mission Creek post office was the farm home of church members William A. and Sarah Nash, formerly of Warren County, Illinois. They had been neighbors of the Reynolds family in Illinois.¹⁸ Reynolds

crossing the Mission Creek bridge, the men soon reached John Smiley's farm three miles southeast of Mission Creek in Marshall County, Kansas. Smiley grew up on a farm near the Reynolds's place in Warren County, attended the local Presbyterian church, and eventually farmed a quarter section of land adjoining his father's property, where he and his wife, Mary, reared their seven children before emigrating west to Johnson County, Missouri. In 1882 the Smileys moved on to Marshall County, Kansas.¹⁹

John Smiley was a self-appointed promoter of northeastern Marshall County. When the Kansas City, Wyandotte & Northwestern Railroad reached his farm in February 1889, Smiley sold the railroad company seventy acres of land and offered to donate the right of way if the railroad would build its train station on his farm. On October 12, 1889, the Summerfield Town Company purchased land from John Smiley and C. F. McCulloch to establish the

18. Harriet Wright and Lydia Jones, *The History of Summerfield* (Frankfort, Kans.: Clawson Printing Co., n.d.), 15. William A. Nash (1847–1925) and Sarah Myril Nash (1848–1896) were married May 18, 1869, in Warren County, Illinois. They are buried in Liberty Cemetery near Liberty, Nebraska. See Lori Laird, "Welcome to Gage County, Nebraska," with a link to "Liberty Cemetery, Gage County, NE," Friends of Wymore Library (<http://www.usgenet.org/usa/ne/county/gage/cemeteries/liberty1.htm>); *Liberty (Neb.) Journal*, December 10, 1896; Marriage entry, May 18, 1869, Marriage Index D, 38, Warren County Courthouse, Monmouth, Ill.; *Atlas of Warren County and the State of Illinois*, map E.

19. *Portrait and Biographical Album of Marshall County, Kansas* (Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1889), 397–98.



While sketches of many prosperous farms such as this one appear in the *Portrait and Biographical Album of Marshall County, Kansas* (1889), Reynolds was not impressed with the area. In his journal he noted that although “hundreds of cattle are grazing on the hills,” the sandy soil and rocky landscape produced poor crops.

town of Summerfield at the site of the station.²⁰ When John Reynolds saw this area of Marshall County in 1886, wild prairie grass covered the rolling prairie. The only interruption in the prairie were groves of young trees and small ravines whose underbrush provided shelter for livestock in the winter.²¹

A few miles south of the John Smiley place were the new farms of Illinois emigrants, some from Warren County. Among these farmers were William Brown, Thomas Brown, and Andrew Hutchinson. Back in 1872, before William Brown moved to Kansas, he farmed land within the same section as the Reynolds family. Thomas Brown farmed a few miles from another Reynolds brother in Sumner Township, Warren County, before emigrating with his son-in-law, Andrew D. Hutchinson, to Kansas in 1883. Upon his arrival in Kansas, Hutchinson purchased a tract of eighty acres one mile southeast of the Smiley farm for

fifteen dollars per acre. Three years later land in this area still brought fifteen to twenty-five dollars per acre; the best sold for thirty dollars per acre.²²

John Reynolds and his companions ate dinner at the home of Will Smiley, John Smiley’s son, who farmed an adjoining eighty-acres. The Smileys and their neighbors raised cattle in relatively large herds on the prairie. In a good year Reynolds reported that area farmers could expect their corn to yield sixty to seventy-five bushels to the acre. But a summer drought—the worst since 1874—cut their 1886 corn crop in half, and in September corn sold at only twenty-five cents per bushel in northeast Marshall County.²³

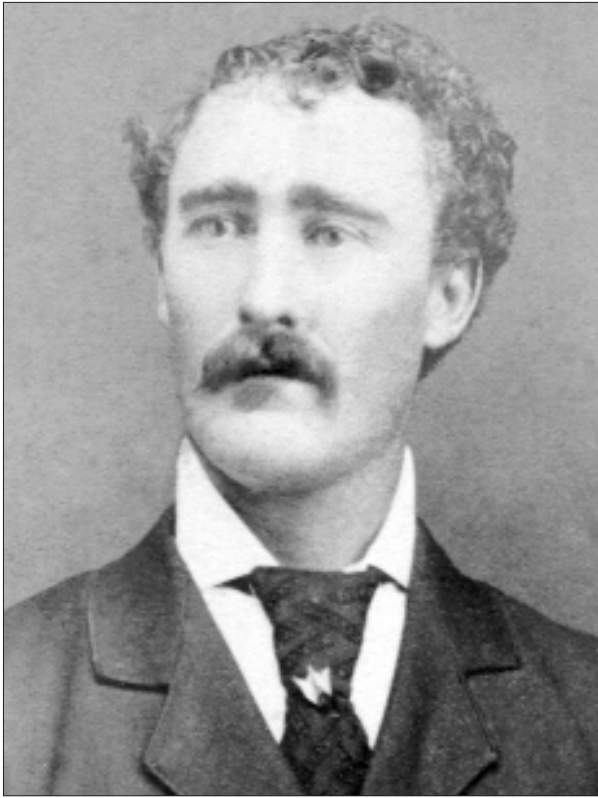
Friday morning, October 1, dawned cold and frosty. The three men drove their wagon south to within two and a half miles of the small town of Beattie served by the St. Joseph and Western Railroad. The land east of town looked nice, but the soil was very sandy and rocky. Most of the land was in pasture; what was fit for cultivation was in corn. At the market, the poor corn brought only twenty cents per bushel. While land just outside of Beattie sold for between forty and sixty dollars per acre, the rocky land far-

20. Wright and Jones, *The History of Summerfield*, 7.

21. Marshall County was organized in 1855. It covers nine hundred square miles of northeastern Kansas where the glaciated region blends into the upper reaches of the Flint Hills characterized by the outcropping of three layers of cherty limestone. In 1886 it had a population density of 25.52 people per square mile. The undulating prairie is cut by streams covered by timber. Farmers planted 132,587 acres in corn, 22,061 acres in oats, and 8,854 acres in wheat during the 1886 growing season. Hogs outnumbered cattle by 13,676 head in 1886. See Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fifth Biennial Report*, 348–51; Ham and Higham, *The Rise of the Wheat State*, 5, 13–14.

22. William Brown owned land less than a mile from the Reynolds farm in section 10 of Hale Township, Warren County, Illinois. See *Atlas of Warren County and the State of Illinois*, map E.

23. Kirke Mechem, ed., *Annals of Kansas, 1886–1925*, vol. 1 (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, n.d.), 19.



In early October, Reynolds and his companions reached Ottawa in Franklin County, where they dined with Ulysses Pinkerton's uncle, George King (left) and his family.

ther east brought fifteen dollars for raw land and twenty-five dollars per acre for improved land.

After dinner the men traveled southeast to Vermillion, a small town of two hundred people on the banks of the Vermillion River. A branch of the Union Pacific Railroad passing through the town provided easy access to the Kansas City markets. South of Vermillion, the men examined a ten-thousand-acre prairie worth, at best, fourteen dollars per acre. The sandy soil and rocky hills produced poor crops. By nightfall the men reached the French Creek bottom north of Onaga in Pottawatomie County. That evening Reynolds recounted his observations of the day:

Our travels of today was through a very sandy rocky Country. no Country for Corn or small Grain all fills [*sic* fields] are in pasture. Plow cannot Enter the Ground on the account of rock. French creek flows through this part of the County and the Banks furnish a great deal of wood, but renders the land on the Bottom very rich for corn. lying off, from the Creek is very steep Bluffs which Cannot be cultivated. on these hills hundreds of Cattle are Grazing and in fine Condition for winter feeders. I could not Recom-

mend this part of the County of Marshall for an Ill[inois] Man would not want land here at any price.

With the bulk of their land prospecting tour behind them, Reynolds and his companions observed the Sabbath on October 3 at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Onaga. During the next four days the three men crossed the Kansas River at the tip of southeastern Pottawatomie County and passed through northeastern Wabaunsee County, southwestern Shawnee County, northeastern Osage County, and into central Franklin County to Ottawa by October 8, 1886.

The men spent the next day in Ottawa where they visited the sights of the town and had dinner with Ulysses Pinkerton's uncle, George King, and his family. That next morning the traveling companions continued eastward through Miami County to the banks of Bull Creek, four miles east of Paola and fifteen miles west of the Missouri border. On October 10, 1886, John Reynolds closed his journal by entering that they enjoyed a "beautiful day of rest. We remembered the Holy Day."

Roughly speaking, Kansas might be divided into two distinct climatic regions. The eastern region has fairly adequate rainfall, it is lightly forested, and it is covered with a rich alluvial loam soil. The western region has less than half of the rainfall as the eastern region, it lacks trees, and it has sandy soil. Reynolds and his companions traveled the northeastern portion of the state that most resembled their own farms in Illinois. The terrain was diverse and the rainfall adequate during normal years.

Several factors contributed to the hardships experienced by many emigrant farmers in Kansas. During the latter half of the nineteenth century the most severe droughts

and dust storms occurred in 1853–1860, 1864–1865, 1873–1880, 1883, 1886–1887, and 1894–1895. In addition to these weather-related disasters, grasshoppers destroyed Kansas crops in 1855–1857, 1866–1868, and 1873–1876. Additionally, the national depression of 1873 caused many emigrant farmers to fail.²⁴

Emigrants from Illinois came to Kansas in large numbers after the Civil War, outnumbering emigrants from other states during the three decades between 1880 and 1910. Because many of the Reynolds's neighbors in Warren County had emigrated to Marshall County, Kansas, during the 1880s, it was not unusual for Reynolds and his relatives to consider emigration, but they made their land prospecting tour at an awkward time. The drought of 1886–1887 was very evident along their journey. Even agricultural pamphlets published during this time were backing away from their earlier inflated predictions concerning agriculture in Kansas and Nebraska. Pamphleteers were beginning to provide more realistic samples of crop production. If Reynolds and his companions read similar agricultural publications back home in Illinois, they would be more cautious in their evaluation of Kansas and Nebraska lands in 1886.²⁵

In his journal, John Reynolds recorded price and production data for wheat, oats, hay, potatoes, trees, orchards, corn, and land during his tour through Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, and Kansas (see Tables 1–6 on the following pages for consolidation and comparison of data). Reynolds gleaned much of this information from his own observations and through conversations with local farmers who offered their opinions about farm commodities at that particular time and place. Reynolds and his companions used these figures to compare with his journal notes on fencing, the availability of water, soil productivity, and their own impressions of the land to evaluate their prospects for possible emigration to Kansas in 1887. The Reynolds brothers showed a particular interest in Marshall County, Kansas, due to their personal connections with recent Illinois emigrants to that county.

Of the five locations for which John Reynolds recorded wheat production statistics, Severance (Doniphan

County), Kansas, recorded the highest yields falling slightly above average in price at fifty-eight cents per bushel. Pike County, Illinois, and Bucklin (Macon County), Missouri, offered the best price for wheat at seventy-five cents per bushel. Reynolds provided no wheat figures for Marshall County.²⁶

The price of oats in all three Doniphan County locations in Kansas exceeded prices reported in all Illinois and Missouri locations by five to ten cents per bushel.²⁷

Reynolds reported the price of apples most often when referring to the value of orchards. Six of the seven locations listing prices were in Kansas. Of these six locations, Severance registered the lowest price for apples at ten cents per bushel while southwestern Shawnee County, northern Osage County, and Michigan Valley in eastern Osage County received sixty cents per bushel for their apples. Vermillion in Marshall County recorded a price of fifty cents per bushel.²⁸

Reynolds recorded corn yield estimates for seven of twenty-one locations mentioned in his journal. Of these estimates, Severance in Doniphan County, produced the largest yields at eighty bushels per acre, slightly surpassing the seventy-five bushels per acre recorded in northern Marshall County. Production from corn fields located in the Missouri River bottoms of northwestern Doniphan County came in at a close third, with forty to seventy-five bushels per acre. Prices for these three big producers were low at twenty-five cents per bushel compared to prices received in several Missouri towns.²⁹

26. According to the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, the average price of winter wheat sold in Marshall County in 1886 was sixty cents per bushel while spring wheat sold for fifty cents per bushel. See Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fifth Biennial Report*, 351.

27. Ibid. Marshall County farmers received an average price of twenty cents per bushel for their oats in 1885 and twenty-five cents per bushel in 1886.

28. Ibid., 352. Marshall County orchards provided the market with apples, pears, peaches, plums, and cherries. The amount of apples produced far exceeded that of other fruit-bearing trees. Apple production increased from 55,660 bushels in 1885 to 64,416 bushels in 1886. The peach crop of 1885 amounted to 46,148 bushels but fell off dramatically to 6,078 in 1886 due to a frost that killed peach buds that year. See Reynolds, "Journal."

29. In 1886 Kansas, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska made up the seven "corn surplus states," the sole contributors to the commercial supply of corn in the United States market. Only Illinois surpassed Kansas in corn production in 1886. In 1887 Marshall County ranked seventh among all Kansas counties in corn production. During that year Marshall County farmers harvested an average of twenty bushels per acre and sold their corn crop at an average price of thirty cents per bushel. See Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Quarterly Report, March 31, 1887* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1887), 3; *ibid.*, *December 31, 1887* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1888), 45–46.

24. William Frank Zornow, *Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 266–67.

25. Bradley H. Baltensperger, "Plains Promoters and Plain Folk: Pre-Migration and Post-Settlement Images of the Central Great Plains" (Ph.D. diss., Clark University, Worcester, Mass., 1977), 180, 182; Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fifth Biennial Report*, 47.

**TABLE 1 WHEAT:
YIELDS AND PRICES**

LOCATION	YIELD (BUSHEL PER ACRE)	PRICE (CENTS PER BUSHEL)
Pike County, Ill.		75
Callao, Mo.	10–15	
Laclede, Mo.		20–25.5
Bucklin, Mo.	10–20	75
Severance, Kans.	30	58

TABLE 2 OATS: YIELDS AND PRICES

LOCATION	YIELD (BUSHEL PER ACRE)	PRICE (CENTS PER BUSHEL)
Green Co., Ill.		25
St. Catherine, Mo.		30
Chillicothe, Mo.	30	
Hamilton, Mo.		25
Osborne, Mo.		25
Stewartsville, Mo.		20
Troy, Kans.		30
Severance, Kans.		30
Elwood, Kans.		30

**TABLE 3: HAY, POTATOES, AND TREES:
YIELDS AND PRICES**

LOCATION	CROP	PRICE
Osborne, Mo.	Potatoes	45 cents per bushel
Osborne, Mo.	Nursery Trees	25–50 cents each
Hamilton, Mo.	Timothy Hay	\$5 per ton
Vermillion, Kans.	Hay	20 cents per 100 lb bale; \$7 per ton in Kansas City; baling cost: \$2 per ton

TABLE 4 ORCHARDS: YIELDS AND PRICES

LOCATION	FRUIT	PRICE (CENTS PER BUSHEL)
Callao, Mo.	Grapes	3 per round
Hamilton, Mo.	Apples	40
Elwood, Kans.	Apples	45
Severance, Kans.	Apples	10–20
Vermillion, Kans.	Apples	50
SW Shawnee Co., Kans.	Apples	60
N. Osage Co., Kans.		60
Michigan Valley, Kans.		60

TABLE 5 CORN: YIELDS AND PRICES

LOCATION	YIELD (BUSHEL PER ACRE)	PRICE (CENTS PER BUSHEL)
Greene Co., Ill.		35
Laclede, Mo.	40	40
St. Catherine, Mo.		50
Chillicothe, Mo.	30	
Breckenridge, Mo.	20–30	
Hamilton, Mo.		40
Osborne, Mo.		25–50
Stewartsville, Mo.		27
Elwood, Kans.		45
Troy, Kans.		40
Severance, Kans.	50–80	25 (new), 35 (old)
NW Doniphan Co., Kans.	40–57	
Hiawatha, Kans.		25
Du Bois, Neb.	35	20 (forenoon) 25 (afternoon)
Liberty, Neb.		22
N. Marshall Co., Kans.	60–75	25
Beattie, Kans.		20
Vermillion, Kans.		20
N. Osage Co., Kans.		25
Michigan Valley, Kans.		25
SW Shawnee Co., Kans.		25

TABLE 6

LAND VALUES IN MISSOURI, KANSAS, AND NEBRASKA

LOCATION	UNIMPROVED	IMPROVED	RAILROAD LANDS	RENTAL
Eleo, Mo.	\$10–\$15	\$30 (best)		
Laclede, Mo.	\$10	\$30 (best)		
Butler, Mo.	\$5–\$20 (hilly and rocky)	\$20	\$2.40, \$5, \$10	
Chillicothe, Mo.	\$20	\$20		
Breckenridge, Mo.	\$20	\$40		
Hamilton, Mo.	\$25	\$40		
Osborne, Mo.	\$30	\$60	\$10–\$20	
Troy, Kans.	\$15	\$100		
Severance, Kans.	\$50–\$100 (black soil)			
NW Doniphan Co., Kans.	\$30 (black, sandy loam)	\$50		
Hiawatha, Kans.				½–¾ shares
NE Nemaha Co., Kans.	320 (100 broken) acres for \$6,000	80 acres for \$1,000		
Du Bois, Neb.	\$20	\$50		
Burchard Prairie, Neb.	14,000 acres at \$15 per acre			
Liberty, Neb.	\$15 (raw)	\$30		
N. Marshall Co., Kans.	\$15–\$25	\$30		⅓ or \$2.50 per acre
Beattie, Kans.	\$15	\$25 or \$40–\$50 (adjoining town)		
Vermillion, Kans.	\$14 (sand and rock) 1,000 acres			
Vermillion, Kans.	\$8–\$15 (as sold by agents)			
St. Mary, Kans.	\$10–\$25 (grazing land)	\$30–\$75		
SW Shawnee Co., Kans.	\$10–\$20	\$100		
N. Osage Co., Kans.	\$10–\$35			
W. Franklin Co., Kans.	\$15–\$60			



Following his tour of Kansas, John Reynolds returned to Warren County, Illinois, where he and his wife, Frona, resided for the remainder of their lives.

Land prices collected by Reynolds reflected the productivity of the soil and the availability of the best land. In September 1886 both raw and improved land in Kansas brought higher prices than land in Nebraska and Missouri. The Doniphan County towns of Severance and Troy ranked highest in sale price. The rich black soil of raw land offered near Severance brought prices of between fifty and one hundred dollars per acre while the improved lands of Troy located a few miles west of the Missouri River and St. Joseph, Missouri, sold just as favorably. Marshall County land reflected a large disparity in land prices. Land in northern Marshall County sold near the average price for land of its kind compared with other locations in the three states that brought below average prices.

In comparison with other counties in Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska, Marshall County proved to be less than desirable. Although favorably impressed with sections of the trans-Missouri region, Reynolds found it could not compete with the familiar soil and climate of Illinois. Wheat and oats production was negligible. Corn production in northern Marshall County compared favorably

with other locations, but grain prices were fairly moderate due to location and the lack of adequate rainfall. Orchards were better than average but not as good as the best. Back in Illinois, Reynolds and his companions were accustomed to living on farms owned by their families for generations. They also knew what to expect from the soils and climate of their Illinois farms. During a period of drought, Marshall County presented a picture of instability that these Illinois farmers found insufficient to cause them to migrate.

No record exists in written or family oral history to explain precisely why Reynolds and his companions decided to remain in Illinois. Reynolds returned to his farm in Warren County, Illinois, where he and his wife, Frona, resided their entire lives. Reynolds gradually became blind in later years due to an eye infection caused from ingestion of wild berries or contact with leaves. It is not known if he contracted this disease while traveling in Kansas and Nebraska. He died in Monmouth on June 5, 1932.³⁰ Richie Reynolds married Ulysses Pinkerton's sister Eva Elizabeth Pinkerton on January 10, 1887. After farming in Warren County for a short time, Richie moved his young family back to Greene County where in 1903, he purchased the Pinkerton homestead. The couple reared their ten children there and farmed this land until his death on November 10,

30. *Portrait and Biographical Album of Warren County, Illinois*, 276; *Atlas of Warren County and the State of Illinois*, map E; Monmouth (Ill.) Review—Atlas, June 6, 1932.



In 1887 Richie Reynolds married Ulysses Pinkerton's sister Eva Elizabeth. After farming for some time in Warren County, the family moved to Greene County, where they purchased the Pinkerton homestead. The Richie Reynolds family is depicted here on the homestead in ca. 1909.

1933.³¹ Pinkerton returned to the family farm in Greene County where he farmed with his father. In 1895 Pinkerton married Hattie Griswold of White Hall, Illinois. He continued to farm near Berdan until his health began to fail. In 1901 the Pinkertons moved to Florida, where Pinkerton died on April 19, 1905.³²

31. Marriage entry 1991, January 11, 1887, Marriage Register, Book 1, 153, Greene County Courthouse, Carrollton, Ill.; *White Hall (Ill.) Register-Republican*, November 24, 1933.

32. Reynolds, "Pinkerton Family History"; *White Hall Register*, April 28, 1905.

Although a large number of farmers left Illinois for Kansas in the 1880s, some decided to remain in Illinois after seeing the land for themselves. In the case of John Reynolds, Richie Reynolds, and Ulysses Pinkerton, family and community connections in Kansas were not enough to warrant migration westward. They found it expedient to first inspect the land personally. In so doing, they could feel confident that they first considered all of the alternatives before deciding not to risk the uncertainties of western migration.

